



Carol A. Mehrling **(1949-)**

First woman Chief of Police of Montgomery County, the largest police department in the U.S. ever headed by a woman

Carol A. Mehrling grew up in Silver Spring. She graduated from Montgomery Blair High School and Montgomery College. As a civilian radio dispatcher for the police department, her father encouraged her to apply for a police association scholarship at Montgomery College. She received the scholarship, and graduated with honors. She then attended Towson State University where she graduated cum laude with a bachelor's degree in sociology and political science.

On March 29, 1971, Mehrling joined the department's all-female-juvenile aid bureau, the only place on the force where women officers were allowed to work at that time. The force then had about 250 officers, and only five were women. As restrictions on the placement of women officers were eliminated, Mehrling moved on to become a corporal in the all-male Narcotics Division, serving as an undercover officer. "I knew what I had to do," Mehrling recalled years later in a 1996 interview with a local Montgomery County newspaper, "I wanted to do the best I could and let that speak for itself." While in the Narcotics Division, she was promoted to sergeant, and became the county's first female sergeant with patrol car duty. She was a patrol sergeant in both the Rockville and Germantown Districts, and moved to the Silver Spring District as a lieutenant.

Mehrling's career in the Police Department included positions of Director of Training at the Police Academy, Director of Youth Services Investigation Division, and Chief of the Investigative Services Bureau, which oversees homicide and other major criminal investigations. In 1992, Capt. Mehrling was selected as the commander of the Bethesda District, one of the county's five police districts.

In 1995, Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan selected Mehrling to become the County Police Chief. Mehrling became the first female Police Chief in the county, and one of about 70 female Police Chiefs nationwide – compared with about 17,000 male chiefs. In 1995, Montgomery County had the second largest police force in the nation, headed by a woman, 939 sworn officers.

Police Chief Mehrling was known for being on the front lines and present at most major crime scenes. She became very visible in the community providing speeches to civic organizations about police work and new policies about domestic violence and car theft. During her tenure, the department was technologically upgraded, satellite police facilities were opened in all five police districts, and the crime rate declined. Mehrling also supported community policing, such as bicycle patrols, a process that she believed, brought officers closed to people. She also created the county's auto theft unit and a "Chief's Youth Initiative" to help parents deal with juvenile crime issues.

Describing herself as a very open, honest, and can-do person, she acknowledged that during her

professional life she was married to her job, and that her colleagues were like family. "The closeness was unbelievable," Mehrling declared to a local newspaper in 1992. "I have a tendency not to balance my life. I've devoted my whole life to this police department because it's so rewarding," she commented to the same paper. "You feel like you're helping to make society a little safer, and that's a good feeling."

Mehrling retired as Chief in 1999 after leading the force for four years, and after serving in the police department for 25 years. She received the 2000 Montgomery County Women's Fair Alpha Award for her achievements in furthering the profile of women by becoming the first female Chief of Police of Montgomery County. The Alpha Award was instituted that year by the Montgomery County Women's Fair to recognize a resident (past or present) of Montgomery County, Maryland, who had achieved a "first" for women, making Mehrling the first recipient of the award.

Mehrling has lived in Montgomery County all her life. She lives in Gaithersburg, and loves animals and golf.

SOURCES:

- The Montgomery County Historical Society Library